



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MODERN EDUCATION (IJMOE)

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ENGLISH IS FUN: AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE USR PROJECT TO STIMULATE YOUNG MINDS

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 05.01.2025

Revised date: 18.02.2025

Accepted date: 11.03.2025

Published date: 16.03.2025

To cite this document:

Ibrahim, S., Morat, B. N., Harun, R., Md. Tahir, N., Badri, Z., & Amat, R. (2025). *English Is Fun: An English Language USR Project To Stimulate Young Minds*. *International Journal of Modern Education*, 7 (24), 790-805.

DOI: 10.35631/IJMOE.724057

Abstract:

Corporate social responsibility is presently in currency at various higher education institutions and is known as university social responsibility or USR. This is relevant to the government's aspiration in attempting to close the gap between universities and communities. One of the efforts taken to get closer to the community was by reaching out to establishments offering preschool education to young learners. The project was named *English is Fun* and is designed to cater to young learners. This project was voluntarily conducted by a group of English language lecturers and a designer at kindergartens in the neighbouring area. The project involved preschool students; organised as a half-day activity, requiring the students to complete a created puzzle on human body parts. Questionnaire surveys were given to the students who joined the activities, and they gave positive feedback. In the future, the efforts can be expanded with other activities at the same preschool establishment or similar activities can be conducted at other kindergartens in other areas. Either way, the bottom line is universities should give back to the communities by offering voluntary services that are practical, easy to execute and also economical.



Introduction

Community service is significant because it promotes a sense of social responsibility and connection among individuals as well as aiding to build stronger, more resilient communities. Through volunteer work, people can address local needs, strengthen vulnerable populations, and support the overall well-being of society. It also encourages personal growth by providing opportunities to develop empathy, leadership skills, and a greater understanding of the diverse challenges faced by others. Irrevocably, community service enriches both the lives of those who give and those who receive, creating a positive cycle of support and engagement. Wilson and Musick (1999) explored the positive effects of volunteering on the volunteers themselves, highlighting how community service contributes to personal growth, social integration, and individuals' well-being. In the same vein, a report by the Corporation for National and Community Service (2007) also reviewed multiple studies highlighting the health benefits of volunteering, including reduced stress, increased longevity, and improved mental health, underscoring the importance of community service for both individuals and communities. In the context of higher education in Malaysia, although most universities have been rather active in delivering community service and community-based participatory projects, the trend is still emerging and requiring more support from various parties (Hafiz, 2014). At the university level, it is currently more commonly called USR (university social responsibility).

Meanwhile, teaching young learners about prominent figures is crucial because it introduces them to role models who have shaped history, culture, science, and society. By discovering the achievements, struggles, and values of these figures, students can gain inspiration and develop a deeper understanding of the world around them. It helps them to see the impact of individual actions on society, advancing a sense of possibility and ambition. Furthermore, these stories can teach essential values, such as perseverance, integrity, and innovation, which are indispensable for personal growth and responsible citizenship. As purported by Barton and Levstik (2004), teaching about prominent historical figures can help learners understand complex social issues, develop critical thinking skills, and appreciate the contributions of individuals in shaping history. It also emphasises the role of historical role models in fostering a sense of identity and purpose among students.

Concomitantly, teaching English language to young learners is considered of great significance in Malaysia. The government's proposal to implement English at the preschool level is appropriate as English is used in the academic and various occupational areas in Malaysia (Aisyah & Noor Raha, 2020). The usage of English in preschools will have a positive impact on language proficiency, especially among children who will use English as L2 in their future (Aisyah & Noor Raha, 2020). National Pre-school Curriculum (NSPC) is one of the steps taken by the government to act as a boost to the quality of local preschools and also to guide preschool teachers to teach English creatively. Thus, providing a comprehensive preschool preparation to learn English is desirable to enrich the minds of the children (Aisyah & Noor Raha, 2020).

Various studies have stated the positive effects of using games in kindergartens. Wang et al. (2011) found that students' motivation and confidence can be elevated in English learning, and their anxiety can be lessened by playing games because of the fun and interesting components in games. Lai & Pharanat (2024) found that children between the ages of five and six have demonstrated a significant improvement in their English listening skills after using the game teaching method and their ability was significantly better than before. Moreover, it improves their ability to speak English and makes the kids more engaged and motivated by stimulating their inquisitiveness in learning. Werlinger and Inostroza (2024) also reported that use of board games could contribute to pre-kindergarten students' increasing oral use of English. They also show that games are beneficial for EFL lessons as they retain and motivate children, permitting them to repeat a task without losing interest. Thezy (2024) also reported that there is a positive influence of puzzle games on the cooperative abilities of children aged 5-6 years in a kindergarten in Indonesia.

Due to the benefits of doing community service and the positive aspects of introducing prominent figures to young learners, couched in using games in teaching and learning of English language, a suitable initiative was developed. This initiative, targeting kindergartens near the university was called *English is Fun*, a USR project to introduce famous people in Malaysia to young learners via the teaching of human body parts by using games in the English language. This paper attempts to answer two objectives which are to expose young learners to prominent figures in Malaysia and to allow young learners to learn basic vocabulary on human body parts in English in an enjoyable environment.

English Is Fun Project

The English is Fun project is summarised in the table below:

Table 1: *English Is Fun* Lesson Plan

NO	TASKS	ACTIVITY
1.	Ice-breaking	Warm-up exercise Game: What is the time now, Mr. Tiger?
2.	Introduction	Students will be asked about human body parts they know. Students will listen and sing along to a song on body parts. Students will share some of the actions that the body parts can do.
3.	While-activity	1. Students are divided into groups of 5. 2. Each group will be provided with one famous figure and a puzzle with names of body parts. 3. Students will work together in a group and match the puzzle pieces to the correct body parts on the famous figure. 4. Students are given some information about the prominent figures. They write three pieces of information about the prominent figures on a manila card. They can also decorate the manila card using their creativity

4.	Closing Surveys	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All groups will present their manila card containing information on the prominent figures. 2. Manage survey using Google forms 3. (Exit survey & content survey)
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To introduce human body parts, five Malaysian role models representing various professions have been chosen. The chosen role models are Tan Sri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (politician/statesman), Dato' Chef Wan (chef), Tan Sri P. Ramlee (artiste), Dato' Nicole Ann David (sportswomen) and Dato' Dr. Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor (astronaut). Using their images, five puzzle boards were originally designed to enable the preschoolers to read and match the human body parts in the English language.

Literature Review

University Social Responsibility (USR)

University Social Responsibility (USR) plays a vital role in fostering societal development by ensuring that higher education institutions contribute positively to their communities. Universities are not only centres of knowledge but also key players in addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. University social responsibility (USR) is another version of the normally known phenomenon of corporate social responsibility CSR (Muhammad Ali et al, 202). Compared to corporate social responsibility (CSR), USR is in its early stages, needing further investigation of its meaning and effect towards higher education institutions (HEIs) (Muhammad Asyraf et al., 2023). HEIs through USR allow universities to engage in ethical governance, community service, and sustainable development initiatives that benefit the public (Vasilescu et al., 2010). By integrating social responsibility into their curricula, universities cultivate students who are socially conscious and equipped to drive change (Nejati et al., 2011). Ultimately, USR strengthens the bond between academic institutions and society, ensuring that universities fulfil their broader mission beyond education by acting as responsible and engaged social entities. Without such commitment, universities risk becoming isolated from the communities they serve.

University Social Responsibility (USR) in Malaysia

University Social Responsibility (USR) in Malaysia is essential in promoting sustainable development, social equity, and national progress. Most commonly, USR in Malaysia has also gained significant traction, with universities and colleges increasingly embedding CSR principles into their curricula and institutional practices (Farina et al., 2024). The Malaysian government has emphasized USR through policies such as the *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education)*, which encourages universities to contribute to social well-being and economic growth (MOHE, 2015). One remarkable aspect about most of the USR programmes led by public and private Malaysian universities is the efforts are aligned with addressing specific global challenges outlined in the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (Jamilah et al., 2024). One of these efforts is named SULAM programme or Service-Learning Malaysia-University for Society. This effort is a student learning and community engagement that combines community service with academic learning, cultivating critical reflective thinking and personal and civic responsibility (Muhammad Zarunnaim, 2024). However, incorporating SULAM into the curriculum, which is a course-based

programme is unlike the volunteering approach that is more synonymous to the CSR concept. This is because SULAM must conform to the course learning outcome and include a structured learning method with comprehensive preparation involving several parties, which the university, students, and community can comprehend (Nur Farah Amirah et al., 2024). Other USR issues in Malaysia include the lack of awareness and knowledge of CSR concepts since many institutions still view CSR as a peripheral activity probably due to insufficient exposure to CSR principles and a lack of integration of these concepts into the educational curriculum (Farina et al, 2024). Moreover, the absence of a clear and unified CSR framework in the universities merely aggravates this issue (Farina et al, 2024). However, despite these deficiencies, USR is still highly relevant and significant in linking universities and the community, not only to improve public trust in higher education institutions but also to ensure that universities contribute meaningfully to Malaysia's vision of becoming a developed and inclusive nation.

Community Service for Preschoolers

Community service programmes aimed at early childhood education have received a lot of attention in the past decade, especially as educators and policymakers realise how important early interventions are in moulding children's long-term academic and social outcomes (Lin & Bates, 2015). Engaging preschoolers in community service initiatives frequently includes educational and interactive activities that promote cognitive, social, and emotional development (Wolf et al., 2022). According to research, community service programmes involving young children can improve their learning experiences and social skills (Hidayat et al., (2022).

These initiatives are often designed around playful learning, with children engaging in songs, games, and interactive tasks that make learning enjoyable and memorable (Manda et al., 2022; Osa-Melero, 2021). Such activities benefit not only the children but also the volunteers who participate, providing great teaching experiences. For example, Hidayat et al. (2022) discovered that university students who participated in community service projects with preschoolers reported greater teaching skills and a better grasp of child development. Furthermore, the participation of local communities, especially educational institutions, in such programmes has been viewed as a means of strengthening relationships between universities and the larger community (Klaw et al., 2023).

Community Service for Preschoolers in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the government's overarching objectives of closing the gap between educational institutions and local communities have increasingly incorporated community service as a key element of corporate social responsibility. Projects such as *English is Fun* exemplify how educational institutions are embracing USR by engaging with local communities through projects aimed at preschoolers. These projects not only support early childhood education but also align with Malaysia's national education policies, which emphasise the importance of community engagement in fostering social responsibility and educational development (Rahmatullah et al., 2020).

As evidenced by the nation's emphasis on bilingual education, community service initiatives in Malaysian preschools frequently seek to improve young learners' English language competence (Berahim et al., 2021; Poon, 2018). These kinds of initiatives are especially critical in rural areas where there may be less access to high-quality English education. Studies have

indicated that providing young children with early exposure to English through engaging and interactive activities can greatly enhance their language acquisition (Carroll, 2015).

Furthermore, the favourable response these programmes have received from instructors and students highlights how widely these can be implemented. For example, Berahim et al. (2021) conducted a study on a similar programme in rural Malaysian kindergartens and found that community service initiatives help preschoolers develop a love of learning and improve their English language skills. Participation in these efforts by university educators enhances the bond between the university and the community while also advancing their professional growth. Furthermore, the positive outcomes of these programs imply that there is a solid basis for growing community service programs in Malaysian preschools.

Introducing Young Learners to Prominent Figures

The NSPC or the National Standard Pre-School Curriculum is built on six pillars, which are Communication, Science and Technology, Spiritual, Attitude, Values and lastly, Humanity (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). Hence, other than ensuring students are prepared to use the English language cognitively in their subsequent schooling years, the preschoolers are also prepared from the affective aspects. Having an activity that incorporates the knowledge of Malaysian prominent figures should encourage them to develop positive values, attitudes and the humanity aspects in themselves. This is supported by Muir (2019) who purported that role models of various kinds can exert substantial influence in shaping our values, attitudes and beliefs. These role models can be exemplified through the mediated frame of the press and the mass media, providing principal models with high status, competence, and power (Muir, 2019). Besides, Osman (2024) proposed the same notion of using role-modelling methods for effective character education as it can be incorporated through structured pedagogy, critical reflection, and student-centred activities to foster moral development. As for the preschoolers, storytelling can be one of the effective ways to introduce these role models to them as this teaching method can captivate their attention, bridge cultural gaps and enhance language learning by creating lasting impressions through engaging narratives and shared experiences (Dvalidze, 2022).

Currently, in terms of involvement with the local communities and preschools, the activities are mostly limited to organised annual visits to the Fire and Rescue Department, local government clinics or dental clinics as part of children's learning activities (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). Commonly, preschools indicate reluctance to involve the local community except for compulsory monitoring activities conducted by the related government agencies as required by law (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). However, *English is Fun* project as a university social responsibility (USR) project has been successfully carried out due to positive support given by the preschool involved.

Relating the literature review on USR and CSR above suggests that the *English is Fun* project was unique, and it generally harboured the original voluntary spirit of CSR. This project is not related to the university curricula nor is it imposed on the volunteers who carried out the project. This identity which marks the English is Fun project makes it a worthwhile project to be carried out and documented.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative methodology by using a questionnaire as the tool for data collection. The study was cross-sectional and the data were collected from the respondents to understand the responses and perceptions of the young learners after playing the puzzles. The questions were designed by the researchers and checked by two experts who have extensive experience in quantitative research.

The sample for this study consisted of 12 children from the entire population who were selected using convenience sampling.

The participants answered the questionnaire after all the activities were conducted. This questionnaire was used to obtain the participant's responses about the activities that they participated in. There were eight items in the questionnaire.

The responses to the questionnaire were based on a three-point Likert scale of 'like', 'neutral' and 'dislike'.

Data collected from the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive analysis and reported as frequency counts and percentages.

Findings

The survey results are presented below.

1. Did you have fun learning today? Adakah adik seronok belajar tentang tubuh badan?

10 responses

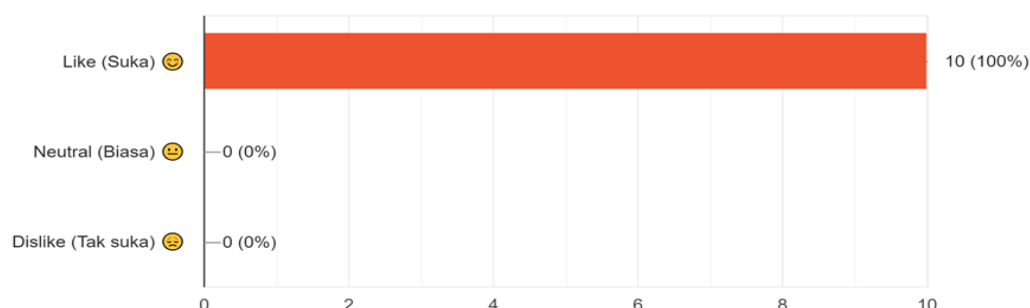


Figure 1: Participants Having Fun

All participants (100%) reported that they had fun learning about the body, indicating a universally positive response to the overall learning experience.

2. Did you like the picture we used? Adakah adik suka gambar yang digunakan?

10 responses

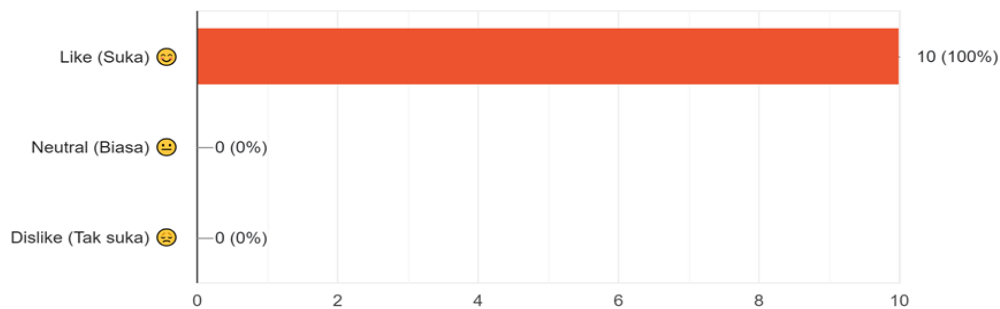


Figure 2: Participants' Responses towards the Puzzle Board Used

Similarly, 100% of the participants liked the pictures used during the lesson, suggesting that visual aids were effective and well-received.

3. Did you like matching the body parts activity? Adakah adik suka aktiviti padankan bahagian-bahagian tubuh?

10 responses

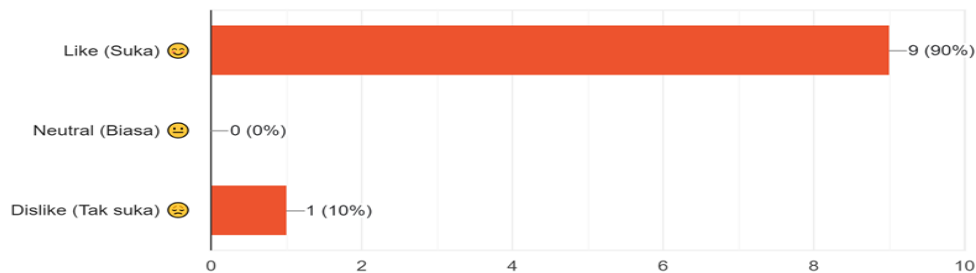


Figure 3: Participants' Responses towards the Matching Activity

The activity of matching body parts was also largely appreciated, with 90% of participants expressing enjoyment, though 10% expressed a dislike for the activity.

4. Did you learn something new about your body today? Adakah adik belajar sesuatu yang baru tentang tubuh badan hari ini?

10 responses

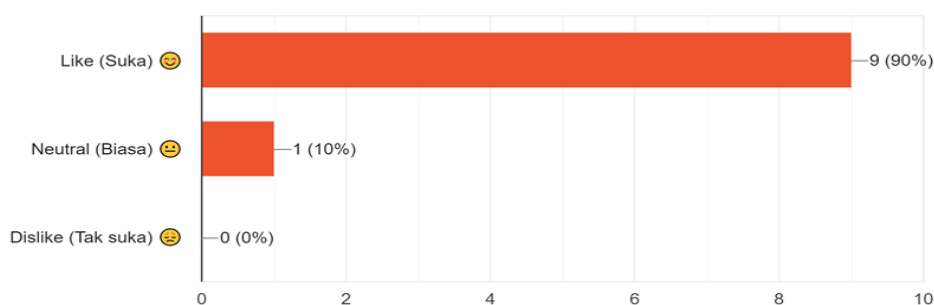


Figure 4: Participants' Responses on Whether They Have Learned Something New

In terms of learning new information, 90% of participants felt they learned something new about their bodies, while 10% remained neutral, suggesting a generally successful educational outcome with some room for further enhancement.

5. Do you like doing activities in small groups like this? Adakah adik suka melakukan aktiviti dalam kumpulan kecil seperti ini?

10 responses

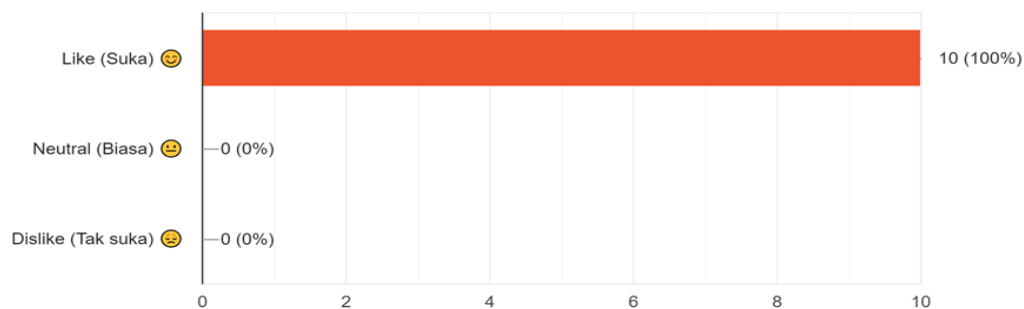


Figure 5: Participants' Responses on Whether They Like Doing Activities in Groups

Regarding the small group activities, 100% of participants liked working in small groups, indicating a preference for interactive and collaborative learning environments. When asked if they would like to engage in similar activities in the future to learn more English, 90% expressed interest, though 10% disliked the idea.

6. Would you like to do similar activities in the future to learn more English? Adakah adik ingin melakukan aktiviti yang sama di masa depan untuk belajar lebih banyak dalam bahasa Inggeris?

10 responses

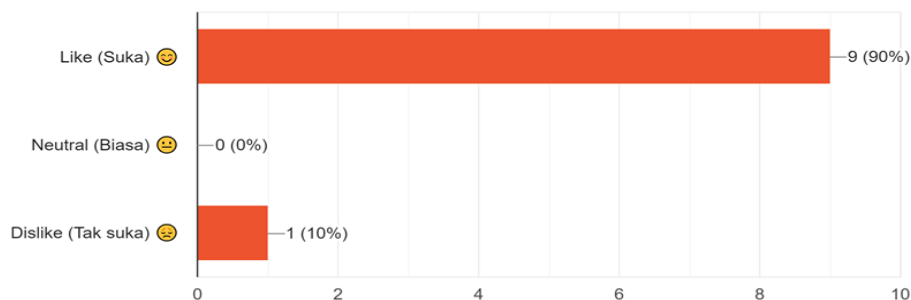


Figure 6: Participants' Responses on Whether They Would Like to Engage in Similar Activities Later

Additionally, all participants (100%) felt excited to learn about the famous figures featured in the activity, and 100% expressed a desire to learn more about famous figures in Malaysia.

7. Do you feel excited to know about the famous figure? Adakah adik rasa seronok menegenali individu terkenal tersebut?

10 responses

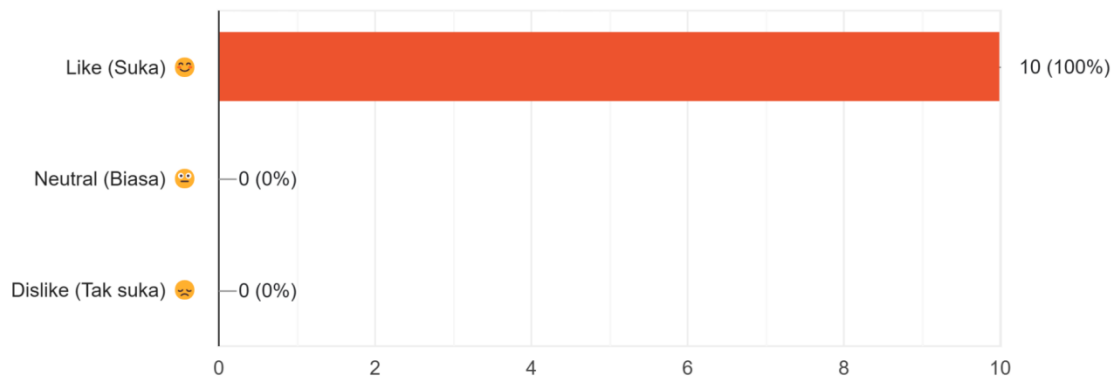


Figure 7: Participants' Responses on Whether They Feel Excited to Know about the Famous Figures

In assessing the participants' excitement in getting to know the famous figures presented to them, all respondents (100%) agreed that they feel excited to know the famous figures namely Tan Sri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (politician/statesman), Dato' Chef Wan (chef), Tan Sri P. Ramlee (artiste), Dato' Nicole Ann David (sportswoman) and Dato' Dr. Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor (astronaut) during the session.

8. Do you want to know more about famous figures in Malaysia? Adakah adik ingin mengetahui dengan lebih lanjut mengenai individu-individu terkenal di Malaysia?

10 responses

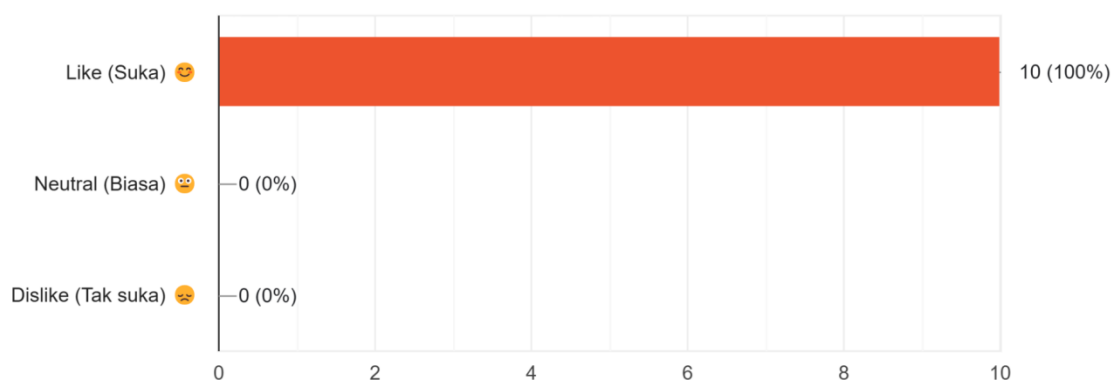


Figure 8: Participants' Responses on Whether They Want to Know More about Famous Figures in Malaysia

Finally, all respondents (100%) agreed that they would like to know more about famous figures in Malaysia, other than figures presented during the session.

In conclusion, the results reflect a highly positive reception of the learning activities, with strong approval for the content, teaching methods, and interactive components. The findings suggest that the programme was effective in engaging and educating the participants, though ongoing improvements and support could further enhance their learning experience and confidence in applying the knowledge.

Discussion

The findings in Figure 1 suggest that 100% of the participants enjoyed the overall learning experience, particularly the activities related to learning body parts. The demand for active participant involvement throughout the activities has fostered positive connections and created a desirable learning experience among the participants. Moreover, the carefully selected materials and well-planned activities contributed to a fun and engaging learning environment for the participants. As Muhabbat (2025) emphasises, exposure to a fun and supportive environment is imperative to elevate learners' motivation in learning English. Therefore, when participants had fun and were engaged in the learning process, the objective of capturing their attention and motivation was fulfilled.

In Figure 2, the results show all the participants favoured the pictures and the puzzle boards used in the activities. During the activities, participants were provided with realistic, appropriately sized pictures of prominent figures to whom they could later relate in their real lives. The results indicate that the participants who are among young learners have shown a strong interest in using pictures or visual aids in learning. Their interests in pictures lead to high engagement and motivation for learning. Berdiyeva (2024) suggested that when young learners could identify real-world issues and interact with realistic materials in lessons, they showed a higher tendency to fully participate in the learning process.

In Figure 3, 90% of the participants valued the body parts matching activity. They showed a strong preference for using board puzzles, where they matched body parts to realistic figures on the puzzles. Utilising puzzles and matching activities in language learning benefits young learners, as these methods make concepts easier to understand and help enhance their vocabulary. As stated by Mirqodirova (2024), activities that include grammar exercises, puzzles, or challenges create a more interactive and engaging learning environment, leading to better understanding and retention.

The results in Figure 4 show that 90% of the participants agreed that they have managed to learn something new. Only 10% of the participants were neutral about this suggesting that they are unsure about whether they have gleaned new information. This suggests that a substantial majority of participants felt that learning about human body parts via famous figures in Malaysia was something original and not yet commonly explored in their day-to-day learning experiences. As already reiterated by Rahmatullah et al. (2021), most local community service activities these days are limited to organised annual visits to the Fire and Rescue Department, local government clinics or dental clinics as part of children's learning activities. Hence, introducing a lesson on human body parts using famous figures is an activity that is rather unique and distinctive.

The results in Figure 5 show that every participant (100%) enjoyed working in small groups, suggesting that they found the experience both engaging and enjoyable. This aligns with research showing that young children learn best through interactive and play-based activities (Wolf et al., 2022; Manda et al., 2022). Furthermore, working in groups not only makes learning fun; it also helps children develop important social and communication skills (Hidayat et al., 2022). In Malaysia, initiatives like *English is Fun* provide opportunities for universities to work with local preschools, creating meaningful learning experiences while strengthening community ties (Rahmatullah et al., 2020). The fact that all participants responded positively emphasises how effective small group activities can be in early language learning. This finding also supports previous studies highlighting how interactive approaches help young learners stay engaged and motivated (Berahim et al., 2021).

In addition, as shown in figure 6, the project the *English is Fun* project positively influenced the students, with 90% of them expressing interest in doing similar activities again in the future to learn more English. This is a strong endorsement of the project that ensures the creation of an enjoyable as well as engaging learning environment for young learners. The interaction by learning through songs, dance and puzzles helped to make the learning interesting and developed a positive attitude towards English. Also, a high percentage of participants expressed an interest in continuing with future activities, indicating that the project fulfilled its primary aim of introducing very basic English vocabulary in a way that suited the children.

The 10% negative responses may be representative of personal preference or differences in levels of engagement in the activities. In any case, the overall positive reaction from the majority suggests that the project has promise for replication and scaling up to other communities. The interest that was evident on the part of both the kindergarten students and teachers alike serves to further underscore the value of such community outreach activities. In the future, colleges and universities have the potential to build on this success by adding more diverse activities or by bringing the initiative to more preschools, ensuring that the benefit of such programmes is made available to a wider population. This is in line with the general mission of building stronger ties between universities and their communities via USR, while promoting early childhood education in an effective and engaging way.

Referring to Figure 7, the finding strongly aligns with the objectives of this community service project, particularly the goal of exposing young learners to prominent Malaysian figures and helping them appreciate the values these individuals embody. The participants' unanimous excitement (100%) in learning about figures like Tan Sri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, Dato' Chef Wan, Tan Sri P. Ramlee, Dato' Nicole Ann David, and Dato' Dr. Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor suggests that these icons successfully captured their interest and excitement during the session. It is because their diverse contributions in politics, culinary arts, entertainment, sports, and space exploration provided valuable lessons on leadership, perseverance, and excellence in the Malaysian context. Dvalidze (2022) believed that telling a story during English lessons can effectively deliver messages to the subconscious through metaphors, fostering deep learning and transformation by allowing knowledge to transfer seamlessly between learners' experiences. Therefore, inspiring stories about famous figures in Malaysia presented to young learners will indirectly pose a greater impact on their learning process. Moreover, the excitement observed during the session indicates that incorporating well-known local personalities into learning activities can enhance engagement, making it easier for young

learners to absorb both moral values and new English vocabulary in a fun and interactive way, fulfilling the USR project's objectives.

Finally, the unanimous interest among participants (100%) in learning about more famous Malaysian figures beyond those introduced in the session, as presented in Figure 8, strongly supports the objectives of this USR project. Their eagerness to get to know more personalities other than those presented during the session indicates that the session successfully exposed them to influential national figures, fostering appreciation for their contributions and the values they represent. This excitement also suggests that well-chosen role models can inspire young learners, encouraging them to develop positive attitudes such as perseverance, leadership, and creativity. Osman (2024) highlighted that role-modelling, when combined with interactive and student-centred methods is a powerful tool for character education and moral development. In addition, the engaging nature of the session likely contributed to their excitement. By incorporating games and songs, this community service project created an enjoyable learning environment that not only introduced famous figures but also facilitated the acquisition of basic English vocabulary in an interactive manner. This has proven that with a refined, interactive approach by incorporating well-known role models can significantly promote both moral and intellectual growth of the young learners (Osman, 2024). The positive response suggests that this approach is effective in sustaining learners' interest and can be further expanded in future initiatives to include more figures and activities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the objectives of this study which are: i) to expose young learners to prominent figures in Malaysia and ii) to allow young learners to learn basic vocabulary on human body parts in English in an enjoyable environment have been answered by the positive survey responses. Nurturing young minds by teaching young children about prominent figures is a compelling way to instil early values of empathy, responsibility, and inspiration. By introducing them to these influential individuals, children can begin to understand the importance of positive contributions to society even at a young age. This USR project nurtures a sense of curiosity and respect for those who have shaped the world and lays the foundation for lifelong learning and community engagement. Through such a programme, young learners can grasp the significance of leadership, kindness, and perseverance, setting them on a path to becoming thoughtful and active members of their communities. In the same vein, young learners can also learn the basic vocabulary necessary to develop mastery of the English language. For future research directions, this study could be expanded with other activities at the same preschool establishment or similar activities can be conducted at other kindergartens. Either way, the bottom line is universities should give back to the communities by offering voluntary services that are practical, easy to execute and also economical.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) for providing us with their full support in assisting us to complete our community engagement activity and for awarding this project a two-star rating out of three-star rating. We would also like to extend our profound gratitude for the indispensable support rendered by the Research Management Unit (RMU) UiTM Cawangan Kedah which has been instrumental in the completion of this journal paper.

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